



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## SFVAHCS COVID-19 VACCINATION UPDATE

The Sioux Falls VA Health Care System is getting weekly allocations of COVID-19 vaccine (around 300 doses) and vaccinating as many veterans as they can once they receive the shipment. Currently, the VA is offering COVID-19 vaccine to veterans already receiving care from the VA, based on CDC and VA risk criteria. If veterans are eligible to get a vaccine, their VA health care team will contact them.

As increased vaccine supply is available, the VA's goal is to offer the COVID-19 vaccine to all staff and veterans who want to be vaccinated. If veterans are not enrolled at the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System, they can call the Eligibility office (605-373-4196) to inquire about enrollment. The most up to date information can be found: <https://www.sioxfalls.va.gov/services/covid-19-vaccines.asp>.

As of Feb 1, 2021, the SFVAHCS has completed 3,638 vaccinations and are currently scheduling veterans age 75+.

COVID vaccination clinics are scheduled for each Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in February. Eligible veterans have either been scheduled or are being called.

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B-1a	All other staff	Homeless veterans; Hemodialysis patients; Solid Organ Transplant patients or patients who are listed for transplant; and Chemotherapy patients Specifically – veterans receiving chemotherapy in a clinic/hospital setting
C-1a		Veterans age 85+
C- 1b		Veterans age 75+



## COVID-19 Vaccine Update

# VABHHCS UPDATE

Horizon Health Care has decided not to renew its contract to provide VA Primary Care Outpatient services in Mission. The contract will expire on March 31, 2021. VABHHCS has had no other interested parties come forward to contract for those services. Veterans assigned to the Mission CBOC will be provided the option to transition their primary care services to South Dakota facilities in Hot Springs, Pierre, Pine Ridge, or Winner, or Gordon, NE. Some veterans may be eligible to receive care through a facility closer to their home through Community Care. VABHHCS is committed to providing high quality health care to impacted veterans and they will offer several options to continue to receive primary care services from the VA.

Veterans affected by the expiration of this contract will receive a letter to discuss the change. VABHHCS will be reaching out to each veteran to discuss their options and reassign their primary care provider. They will continue to provide veterans excellent care through the Homeless and Tribal HUD VASH programs as well as providing access to telehealth appointments from the Rosebud Veterans Building.

Also, VABHHCS is continuing with their phased plan to offer COVID-19 vaccines to veterans and VA health care personnel. This plan is based on Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) guidelines. Their focus has been on veterans who are at least 75 years old and

- Veterans who are experiencing homelessness, especially those living in congregate settings
- Veterans who've received a solid organ transplant
- Veterans who currently receive in-person chemotherapy or hemodialysis treatment at the VA
- Veterans with multiple chronic conditions who would be at high risk for mortality if they contracted COVID
- Veterans who are essential front line workers.

At the end of January they have vaccinated 2,275 veterans for their first dose and 71 with the second dose. They have full vaccination clinics in Winner, Rapid City, Fort Meade, and Hot Springs.

The next priority group of veterans who will be eligible are those ages 65-74. VABHHCS is using letters and VEText to communicate with this group. These communications will be slowly rolling out as they learn of their weekly vaccine allocations. They have begun offering vaccines in Scottsbluff, Rapid City, and Winner CBOC's. Their ability to expand to other clinics depends on their weekly allocations and staffing. In the meantime, clinics remain full at Fort Meade and Hot Springs.

On January 16<sup>th</sup>, VABHHCS held a very successful Vaccine Blitz where 492 veterans received their first dose. This group will return for their second dose on February 16<sup>th</sup>. Both Hot Springs and Fort Meade offer in-person and drive thru vaccinations. On February 1, Fort Meade moved into a new in-person clinic location to expand the space and capacity for appointments. They are not offering walk in vaccinations; veterans must have an appointment.



# VA COMMEMORATES 75 YEARS OF ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) marked their 75th anniversary, Jan. 30, of its [VA's academic affiliations program](#) which provides training to nearly 70% of the country's physicians.

The program is affiliated with more than 1,800 academic institutions, including 97% of America's medical schools — training future health professionals in over 40 disciplines including physicians, psychologists, nurses, pharmacists, and social workers.

The VA, its medical centers, academic affiliates, and other partners nationwide are recognizing this milestone with events and activities throughout the year, highlighting the history and continuing achievements of its academic mission under the “Passion to learn—Power to heal” theme.

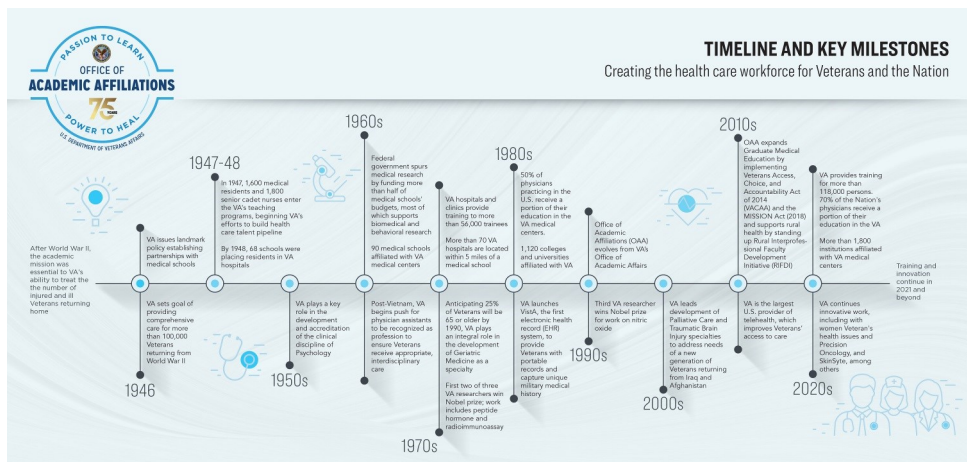
“The VA’s mission to educate health professionals is vital to the future of health care,” said VA Acting Chief of the Academic Affiliations Office Karen M. Sanders, M.D. “Our academic partnerships set the standard for care and bring the latest health innovations to the VA as we train doctors, nurses, mental health professionals, and others who care for veterans and patients across the nation.”

The VA’s academic mission began in 1946 with the adoption of [Policy Memorandum No. 2](#), establishing a partnership between VA and its academic affiliates. [Seventy-five years later](#), approximately 120,000 health professional trainees help care for more than nine million veterans at clinical sites across the country. These future professionals are the nation’s health care workforce pipeline who will go on to care for veterans and other patients in urban and rural communities across the U.S.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the VA worked with health professional trainees from various medical schools and programs nationwide to care for veterans virtually and in person, while completing their training requirements. The number of physician residents training in the VA during the past year increased by more than 2,000 and, according to the American Association of Medical Colleges, applications to medical schools have increased by 18% for the upcoming 2021 academic year.



Learn more about the [history of the Veterans Health Administration](#) (VHA) and details about [VHA's 75th anniversary activities](#). Visit [VA's Office of Academic Affiliations](#) for more information about academic affiliates.



# VA EASING ECONOMIC HARDSHIP FOR VETERANS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is steadfast leading the way in President Joseph Biden's Jan. 22 [Executive Order](#) to deliver economic relief to Americans amid the COVID-19 crisis by addressing economic hardships the veteran community faces during the ongoing pandemic.

"Through no fault of their own, our veterans and their loved ones continue to face economic hardship due to the pandemic," said Acting Secretary of United States Department of Veterans Affairs Dat P. Tran. "I want to assure veterans, their family members, survivors, and caregivers that we are doing everything we can to lessen their burden and worry."

Effective January 29, the VA will extend the existing moratorium on evictions and foreclosures until March 31, 2021. VA borrowers experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19 can review [VA guidance for borrowers](#) or call 877-827-3702 for additional information.

The VA is also looking for immediate ways to help over two million veterans maintain their financial footing by exploring options to ease the burden of federal collections on compensation and pension overpayments, and medical and education-related debts.

"The VA will provide updated information and guidance for veterans at [va.gov](#) on this effort as soon as possible," said Tran. "The VA is focused on lessening these financial hardships for America's Veterans. We will continue to work with our partners in Congress and veterans service organizations to honor our veterans and their families by providing care and benefits they earned and deserve."

## FEBRUARY EVENTS AT MILITARY HERITAGE ALLIANCE

Looks like the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance in Sioux Falls has some great events planned for February.

Friday, Feb. 12, kids can bring their favorite adult for a date night from 6:00 pm –9:00 pm. Date night includes a kid friendly dinner, decorating cupcakes, a cocoa booth, flowers, activities, and a photographer will be on hand to take some special photos. Date night fees are \$15 for adults/\$10 for kids.

Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 13-14, is their "chocolate festival" from 8:00 am—2:00 pm offering Sioux Falls' best chocolates and Valentine's gifts for that special someone in your life.

On Saturday, Feb. 13, the Dueling Pianos will be featured at Valentines Date Night. The fee is \$45 per couple with cocktail hour at 6:00 pm and dinner and Dueling Pianos entertainment from 7:00 pm—11:00 pm.

Visit: <https://boxoffice.washingtonpavilion.org/southdakotaalliance/Online/> for more information on these events or to order tickets.

# SUICIDE PREVENTION TRAINING OPPORTUNITY

South Dakota is home to over 60,000 veterans. Approximately 20 veterans or military-connected individuals die by suicide each day nationwide. Two-thirds of those do not use the VA for healthcare or other services and may or may not be receiving care in the community.

Suicide prevention is the VA's #1 clinical priority, but the VA cannot do it alone. The VA's Community Based Interventions (CBI) rely on partnerships with community stakeholders to ensure the safety of all veterans and service members. Through a public health approach, the Sioux Falls Suicide Prevention Veteran Subcommittee is facilitating a multi-part Service Member, Veteran, and Families (SMVF) Virtual Campaign to provide education and inspiration on how to best care for our nation's heroes.

**The Subcommittee would like to invite you to the first Virtual Campaign Best Practice Event: Suicide Prevention is Everyone's Business.** This training will cover fundamentals of the public health approach to suicide prevention, safe messaging techniques, and what everyone can do to support the SMVF population and more broadly, anyone in a mental health crisis. This 60-minute educational opportunity will be facilitated via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday, March 2 from 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. in addition to Wednesday, March 10 from 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

Following the event, members of the Veteran Subcommittee will work with organizations to implement and/or improve safe messaging practices used when reporting on suicide.

To register or if you have questions, please contact Jon Feiock at the email address below or by calling 605-681-7057 by Friday, February 5.

The Sioux Falls Suicide Prevention Task Force Veteran Subcommittee operates under the Suicide Prevention Task Force, led by the Helpline Center. Subcommittee membership includes both the civilian and military population in local businesses, non-profits, healthcare, faith-based organizations, as well as city and county staff. Membership is open to anyone willing to commit to attending most monthly meetings and providing time and service to local initiatives.

Contact Jon Feiock [jonathan.feiock@va.gov](mailto:jonathan.feiock@va.gov) for more information.





# VA ADMINISTERS ONE MILLION COVID-19 DOSES

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reached a milestone in just a month and a half's time administering one million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to veterans and VA health care workers.

As of Feb. 2, the VA has dispensed at least one dose of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccine to more than 582,000 veterans and has fully vaccinated over 44,000, totaling more than 626,000 doses. This is in addition to administering more than 401,000 doses to VA employees, and more than 1,200 vaccine doses to federal partners.

"In addition to administering one million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, the VA has begun publishing the number of veterans who have received Pfizer-



Department of Veterans Affairs  
COVID-19 National Summary

er-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines at each facility across its enterprise," said Acting VA Secretary Dat Tran. "The number of doses administered to veterans at each facility will be updated daily on the [VA COVID-19 National Summary website](#)."

VA employees across the country are working diligently to vaccinate the Department's health care personnel and the most vulnerable veterans as quickly as possible. Making the data about vaccine doses administered to veterans available publicly, the VA is taking another step toward being as transparent as possible during the pandemic.

The VA is currently providing vaccines at more than 215 sites nationally with plans to expand to additional sites as vaccine supplies increase. As with states distributing vaccines, the VA is currently in the limited supply phase, anticipating an increase in weekly vaccine doses in March. Until the VA receives an increase in vaccines, many facilities may temporarily run out of vaccines for short periods of time.

The VA will continue to follow current [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) guidance](#) and the [VA COVID-19 Vaccination Distribution Plan](#) until new CDC guidance is available. The distribution plan lays out the VA's overarching intent but implementation of vaccination on a large scale requires agility and flexibility in order to meet the daily threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The federal government will continue to work with states and the private sector to effectively execute an aggressive vaccination strategy, focusing on the immediate actions necessary to convert vaccines into vaccinations.

The VA is reaching out to veterans who are eligible for vaccination. Veterans who would like additional information can visit the [VA COVID-19 vaccines](#) webpage, visit their [local facility's website](#), or contact their care team.

# VA SEEKS FEEDBACK TO GUIDE FUTURE VISION OF VA HEALTHCARE

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) published a draft decision for criteria Feb. 1 in the Federal Register to be used by VA's Secretary to develop recommendations for the future of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) health care.

The criteria are based on specific factors outlined in the [VA MISSION Act of 2018](#) (MISSION Act), which gives Veterans greater access to health care in VA facilities and the community, and input received through collaboration with stakeholders, including veterans and veterans service organizations.

The criteria includes the following categories: veterans' need for care and services; accessibility of care for veterans; impact on mission; providing the highest quality whole health care; effective use of resources; and ensuring a safe environment of care.

In accordance with the MISSION Act, the VA is conducting market assessments for each of VA's markets to design high-performing networks of care. The networks will consist of a more flexible platform that can provide quality, readily accessible, cost-effective care through VHA and leverage the best of care provided by federal partners, academic affiliates, and other private sector providers. Recommendations from the assessments will be finalized utilizing the approved criteria and submitted by VA's Secretary to the presidentially appointed [Asset and Infrastructure Review \(AIR\) Commission](#) for their consideration in January 2022.

"VA health care is the backstop to the United States' health care system and must be strengthened to provide quality care that can be sustained into the future," said Acting VA Secretary Dat Tran. "We want to hear from veterans and all our stakeholders on the draft decision criteria as the beginning of a broader conversation about how VA can best meet veterans' health care needs for generations to come."

In addition to analyzing public comments, the VA will be hosting virtual listening sessions in the coming months. The feedback will be used to provide recommendations for creating networks of care to be reviewed by the AIR Commission, President Biden, and Congress.

View the draft decision criteria and make comments at the [Federal Register](#) webpage. The public comment period ends 90 days after Feb. 1.



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# MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT DAY OF GIVING



On Tuesday, March 23, 2021, participating Culver's restaurants in Iowa, South Dakota and Minnesota will donate 10% of sales to Midwest Honor Flight.

The mission: to fly WWII, Korean War and Vietnam Veterans to see their memorials in Washington, DC.

Enjoy a delicious meal, benefit a great cause and feel good all over!  
A representative of the Midwest Honor Flight will be present at each location from 5-8pm.

Thank you for your support.

## IOWA

Culver's of Sioux Center  
Culver's of Sioux City Locations

## SOUTH DAKOTA

Culver's of Rapid City locations  
Culver's of Mitchell  
Culver's of Yankton  
Culver's of Aberdeen  
Culver's of Sioux Falls locations  
Culver's of Spearfish

## MINNESOTA

Culver's of Marshall



[culvers.com](https://culvers.com)



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 15—State Offices will be closed

June 24-27—American Legion State Convention—Huron

Aug 16-19—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Ramkota Hotel—Pierre

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